



Fort Bend County Podcasts

Podcast Episode 59 – Blunt Truths: THC and Teen Development

April 23, 2026

****Disclaimer****-Please note, anything that is said in the podcast does not supersede actual plan or program languages, and anyone wishing for specific information in regard to coverage should go directly to the plan documents found under risk management on eConnect.

Gina: Welcome to this week's Benefit Detective podcast. I'm Gina, and co-hosting with me today is our other Benefit Detective, Destanie Galarza.

Destanie: Hi, guys. And I would like to welcome back Dr. Lu. Hi, Dr. Lu.

Dr. Lu: Hello. Good to see y'all again.

Gina: Did you know that THC or marijuana has numerous impacts on male development milestones?

Destanie: Oh, really?

Gina: Yeah. It can affect sperm quality, lower testosterone levels, and overall reproductive health, potentially leading to infertility and other reproductive health issues.

Destanie: Wow. That's really interesting. Well, did you know that in women, THC can negatively affect ovarian follicle maturation, ovulation, placental function, and prenatal development? Prenatal exposure to THC is associated with the risk of reduced birth weight, birth defects, SIDS, or lactation problems due to the penetration of THC metabolites into breast milk. And marijuana during pregnancy can lead to behavioral and emotional issues in children, such as anxiety, depression, and impulsivity.

Destanie: So with all that being said, Dr. Lu, what areas of development are most impacted in teens?

Dr. Lu: Good question. Using cannabis before age 18 may negatively affect how the brain builds connections for functions like attention, memory, and learning, which can lead to difficulty thinking and problem-solving, reduced coordination, and problems with school and social life. The effects may last a long time or even be permanent, but more research is needed to fully understand these effects. Marijuana can also affect mood and is particularly associated with anxiety, depression, psychosis, and schizophrenia. Decision-making is impaired acutely while consuming marijuana or THC products, and addictive behaviors may also affect decision-making even when not actively consuming marijuana or related products.

Gina: You know, with that being said, I did find an article I thought was kinda interesting on the National Institute of Health saying that cannabis use in adolescence often leads to mental health and behavioral health changes, which affect the quality of life in their adulthood. So use in this period is strongly associated with mood disorders, split personalities, anxiety, behavioral, and neurocognitive disorders.



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Destanie: So we've been talking about the mental effects, but how does THC affect teens physically? Does it stunt their growth at all?

Dr. Lu: Yes. Chronic or heavy use during adolescence has been associated with slightly reduced adult height in some studies and possible delayed puberty, especially in males.

Gina: What are the potential long-term consequences of starting THC or marijuana use at a young age?

Dr. Lu: Well, there are several effects, so we'll go over all those. The teen brain is actively developing and continues to develop until approximately age 25. Therefore, cannabis use during adolescence and young adulthood may harm the developing brain. As mentioned previously, young cannabis users may have trouble remembering things and focusing, which can lead to impaired academic performance. And teens who use cannabis are more likely to quit high school or not get a college degree at all.

Dr. Lu: Cannabis has been linked to a range of mental health problems, such as depression and social anxiety. People who use cannabis are more likely to develop temporary psychosis, which means they may not know what is real versus hallucinations, and they may become paranoid. Cannabis can lead to long-lasting mental disorders, including schizophrenia, which is a type of mental illness where people might see or hear things that aren't there. The association between cannabis and schizophrenia is stronger in people who start using cannabis at an earlier age and use cannabis more frequently.

Dr. Lu: Also, there's the potential for addiction. Approximately three in ten people who use cannabis have cannabis use disorder. Some signs and symptoms of cannabis use disorder include trying but failing to quit using cannabis or giving up important activities with friends and family in favor of using cannabis. The risk of developing cannabis use disorder is stronger in people who start using cannabis during youth or adolescence and who use cannabis more frequently.

Destanie: Thank you, Dr. Lu, for joining us today and for that information.

Dr. Lu: Thank you for having me again.

Destanie: If you or your dependent are wanting to talk to someone regarding THC dependency, please refer to the employee assistance program, allonehealth.com/deeroaks using company code: Fort Bend, or you can contact +1 (888) 993-7650.

Gina: Well, that's a wrap for this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Gina.

Destanie: I'm Destanie. And listen for our next podcast.

Gina: And remember, the Benefit Detectives are here to help.